



The Ames Intelligencer

Published by Ames Heritage Association, Inc.
Member of American Association for Local & State History

"Iowa's Kid's Heroes": Theme of the Annual Meeting

Who are the men and women whom Iowa children most admire, and what do their choices of heroes tell us about who we are? "Iowa's Kid's Heroes: Past and Present" is the theme of this year's annual membership meeting hosted by the Ames Heritage Association and scheduled for Monday, January 21, 1991, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Ames Public Library at 515 Douglas Avenue in Ames. The association is pleased to present Tom Morain, director of research and interpretation at Living History Farms in Des Moines, as the featured speaker.

According to Tom, several polls through the years have asked children to identify their idols, and a recent study of Iowa school children brings the story up-to-date. The trends reveal some fascinating insights about the changing nature of Iowa life.

A native of Jefferson, Iowa, Tom has held his current position at the Farms since 1981. He attended Graceland College and the University of Iowa and taught history at Iowa State University for five years. He is the author of *Prairie Grass Roots*, a history of his hometown

that won the State Historical Society's award as the most important book on Iowa history published in 1988. He is also the author of a new children's textbook on Iowa history.

All Ames Heritage Association members and the general public are invited to this special program. Board

members will present a brief update about association projects during the past year, and elections of board members and officers for 1991 will be held. Tom Morain's program will follow this business meeting, and refreshments will be served. Memberships in the Ames Heritage Association, as well as a limited number of 1991

Ames historical calendars, will be available for sale.

For more information about the annual meeting and the Ames Heritage Association, contact president Kathy Svec at 232-4877.

Inside ... A special article about the early African-American families of Ames. Part one of two parts.



Tom Morain, director of research and interpretation at Living History Farms, will be the keynote speaker for the annual meeting.



These photos of Nancy and Archie Martin were taken in North Carolina before they moved to Ames in 1915. They became one of a handful of prominent black families in the city.

Early African-American Families of Ames

by Farwell T. Brown

The following is part one of a two-part special article about early African-American families of Ames. The second part of this article will appear in the Spring 1991 issue of The Ames Intelligencer.

Affirmative action, quotas, racism, and all manner of discriminatory issues are frequent concerns of our present day. Historically, however, Ames was something of an island, an oasis, when it came to racial issues. That was especially true when it came to African-American residents.

When Ames was established in 1864, many of its settlers were of New England background and abolitionist in sentiment. But very few people here had ever had personal contact with black people. The U.S. Census of 1870, the first that provides an enumeration of Ames residents, reported only one black person here. That was E.W. Riley, a man of 40, who resided in the W.W. Fitchpatrick household. The Fitchpatrick residence was in the vicinity of the present D.O.T. headquarters on what then was the Boone Road. Riley was single and gave his occupation as that of farm laborer.

In 1885, Iowa State College's second president, Leigh Hunt, arrived with rather grand ideas that seemed arrogant to both the public and the student body. A fancy carriage for his personal use, with a black attendant, was only one reason for Hunt's decision to resign after only one year at the college. Ames was too far north and too mid-western for that sort of behavior.

George Washington Carver was the first black student to graduate from Iowa State College. When he completed his work in Ames in 1896, he probably was the only black student on the campus and likely the

only black person in Ames. Carver experienced the support and special attention that derived from that circumstance and from the special qualities that people recognized in him. But Carver experienced discrimination among some students and faculty who were motivated by fear of the unknown. At first, he was told that he would not eat at the same table with white students, and a white student from an Iowa farm background refused to eat from the plate served to her by Carver when he worked as a waiter in a student dining room.

But Carver chose to find inspiration from the interest and support of important people in the college community. He would always say that he was very well-treated in Ames. His relationships with the Budd family, "Tama Jim" Wilson, Henry Wallace, and others were a part of Carver's legend in Iowa State's history, and today a building on the Iowa State University campus bears his name. Carver gave little heed to slights that came his way because of his racial distinction, and he would always indicate his appreciation of his Ames experience.

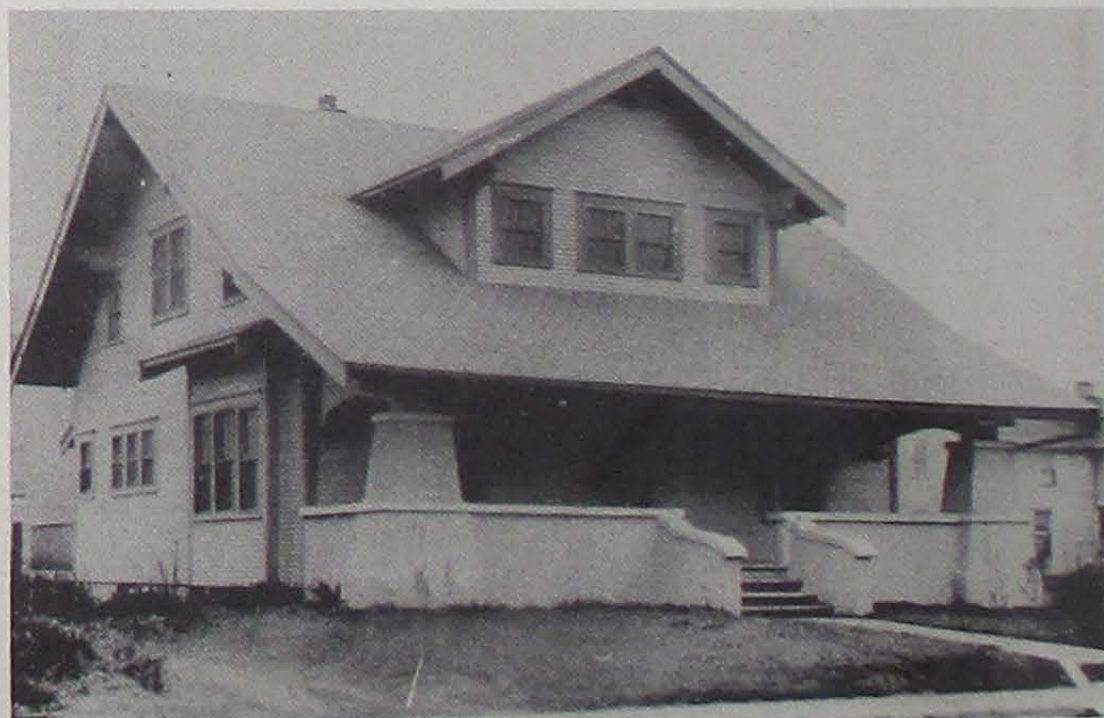
Black Community Develops

There seems to be no record of any African-American families in Ames until well after 1900. One of the first African-American families to make Ames their permanent residence was the Gater family,

who lived on the corner of 12th and Kellogg, one block north of where I lived as a boy. Edwin Gater purchased the home at the location in 1911, and he and his wife lived there until they moved to the Minneapolis area sometime before 1936. Gater's occupation was given as that of porter in an early directory. He apparently was still an employee of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad when the family chose to make Ames their home. In 1916, Gater took a job as waiter in the new Sheldon-Munn Hotel. Gater and his wife, Myra, had two daughters. Martha, the older daughter, graduated from Ames High School in 1928.

G. A. Gater, I believe, was a brother of Edwin Gater, since the two families were mentioned together in the local paper's account of family gatherings at the home on Kellogg. G.A. Gater and his wife lived in the 1200 block of Grand Avenue. His occupation was given as porter in an Ames directory.

In 1914, the *Ames Times* carried a news item announcing that the last building removed from Main Street in preparation for the construction of the Sheldon-Munn Hotel was the one-story frame structure where the "Gater Shoe Shine Parlor" was located. That was Edwin Gater's



The Archie and Nancy Martin home on Lincoln Way was the site of many local gatherings for the small black population in Ames. The second floor of the home was reserved for African-American students attending Iowa State College.

shop. It was being moved to a location in campustown where it would be made into a lunch counter. I believe that both of the Gater brothers were employed at the Sheldon-Munn Hotel following its completion in 1916.

The Edwin Gater family, from all appearances and from my memory, were well-accepted in their neighborhood. Former neighbors have told me of the Gater children becoming playmates of white children of their age. Surely the Gater family experienced the isolation that resulted from being the only black family in the neighborhood. But soon there were a few more black students at Iowa State College, and by 1915 there were several other black families living in Ames. In 1918, Mrs. Gater and her husband organized a dinner party for five young black men from the area who were leaving for duty in the Army during World War I. That event was reported in the July 15, 1918 issue of the *Weekly Tribune*.

In her remarks to the young men that evening, Mrs. Gater was quoted as saying that "the Mutual Club of Ames had been organized that the Negro might come to have better advantages, take their places where they belonged, and make of

themselves citizens of worth and character." These African-American people had formed what today we might refer to as a support group. Because they resided in separate communities about town, they relied upon other blacks for much of their social support.

Between 1913 and 1916, there were three black families who arrived to establish Ames as their home. The Martin, Shipp, and Lawrie families would become well-known in the Ames community. All three of these families made Ames their permanent residence. Several black families who reside in Ames today are descendants of two of those families.

The Lawrie Family

Mr. and Mrs. Lawrie were tailors. At first they lived in a second floor apartment on Main Street while Moses Lawrie did the alteration work in Jameson's men's clothing store. Later, in 1923, Moses and his wife, Ollie, purchased the house on 11th Street one-half block east of Kellogg Avenue. By then they had their own tailor shop. Their shop was located first on the east side of Kellogg and south of Main Street. Later their



Archie Martin, Jr., son of Archie and Nancy Martin, shown here in a 1918 photo, made his home in Des Moines.

shop was on the south side of the east end of Main Street. They had one son, John, who later lived in Los Angeles.

The Lawries and Gaters both lived in my neighborhood about a block and a half from each other. I took my clothing repair work to the Lawries a number of times and remember them as being reliable and friendly. Unfortunately, I do not remember them very much as a part of the neighborhood. They both worked in their shop every day, and they probably limited their social contact to that of other black families in town. The white neighbors around them at that time would not have recognized their lack of contact with the Lawries as being "discrimination."

Early Activist

Moses Lawrie was the outspoken "activist" among the black families in Ames. On several occasions, he wrote letters that were published in the *Ames Tribune*. In the 1920s, there were several instances when black passengers were alleged to have been mistreated on the street car between downtown Ames and the campus. One of Lawrie's well-written letters appeared at the time, because he was not satisfied that sufficient action had been taken.

At about that same time, there was an incident involving a local white man who confronted a young black woman. Leaving the fraternity, where she worked as a kitchen maid, in the early evening after completing her work, she was confronted on several occasions by the



Archie Martin, seated in the front center, celebrates his 100th birthday. Archie Martin died in 1960 at the age of 102. His descendants included five sons and two daughters, 32 grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren. Seated next to Archie Martin is Paul Martin. In the back row, left to right, are Ernest Simmons, Archie Martin, Jr., Nellie Martin Shipp, Tom Jackman, Bob Martin, and Esther Jackman Martin, wife of Paul.



Al Martin, son of Archie and Nancy Martin, was a standout on both the football and basketball teams at Ames High School during the 1920s.

man, who would appear from behind a tree or shrubs. She resisted the man's demand for dates and was able to escape without harm, asking him to leave her alone. When the man persisted in his harassment, she reported the matter to the local police. A stake-out resulted in the man's capture and arrest. She at first refused to bring charges because she did not wish to embarrass the man's family. I think that it was Lawrie and others who convinced her to proceed with the charge of harassment against the man. He was promptly found guilty in court and fined \$25.00. The story was covered on the front page of an Ames newspaper.

The Martin and Shipp Families

Archie and Nancy Martin came to Ames from North Carolina in 1915. Nancy Martin died in 1947; Archie died in 1960 at the age of 102. John Shipp, born in Georgia, had arrived in 1916 and, following his marriage to Martin's daughter, Nellie, made his home here until his death in 1963 at the age of 77. These two families

represent an important chapter in African-American history in our community.

In 1919, Archie and Nancy Martin purchased a lot about two doors east of the corner on the south side of Lincoln Way near the Kellogg intersection. There they built their home, which today remains in the Martin and Shipp families. The Martin family included sons Al, Ernest, Paul, Robert, and Archie, Jr., and daughters Nellie and Julia. Archie lived to know 32 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

Blacks Almost Unknown At Iowa State

In 1910, the president of Iowa State College, A.B. Storms, in response to an inquiry from Atlanta, Georgia, provided the information that there had been two blacks graduated from Iowa State. In his response, Storms stated that "Negro students are entirely welcome at this institution. They have no discourtesy whatever shown them by fellow students or others. It is not always easy for a Negro student to find rooming and boarding accommodations except where there are enough to room and board together, as is the case with Filipinos and with students of other nationalities."

In 1910, Storms' statement may have been reasonably correct. Following Carver's graduation, it was not until 1904 that a second black student graduated. It would be 1914 before the third would graduate from Iowa State. Archie Martin was one to whom a growing number of black students could go for counsel. Some of those black students found rooms at Archie and Nancy Martin's home on Lincoln Way. Although George Washington Carver had left Iowa State before the Martin family came to Ames, he was a resident in their home when he had occasion to return to Ames.

President Storms' statement concerning the difficulty that black students had in finding lodging and boarding in Ames continued to be true for a long time. The number of black students coming to Iowa State was not large, but, with local folks

like Archie Martin looking after the interest of black students, they managed. Martin provided lodging for a respectable number of students himself. But a few years after World War I, with the number of black students growing, that became impossible.

In a recent conversation, one of Archie Martin's grandsons related to me how his grandfather made an appointment with R.A. Pearson, president of Iowa State between 1912 and 1926, to discuss the problem of housing for black students. Pearson agreed to see that black students would be admitted to college dormitories on an equal basis with white students. But that fall, black students came to Martin telling him that their difficulties in getting rooms on the campus still existed. Only after Archie Martin returned to Pearson's office did black students begin to find it easier to acquire lodging in campus facilities.

End part one. Part two to be published in the Spring 1991 issue of The Ames Intelligencer



This 1986 photograph shows, from left to right, Nellie Martin Shipp and her two sons, Grantland Shipp and John Shipp, Jr., during a family reunion.

Updates

- The Board of Directors of the Ames Heritage Association extends its deepest sympathy to Ames Heritage Association board member Jack Adams on the death of his father, Clinton J. Adams, in December 1990. Clinton Adams was a prominent and well-known local businessman and community leader.

- The Board of Directors congratulates Marvin and Thelma Miller on the celebration of their 50th wedding anniversary in January 1991. Marv is a former board member and long-time treasurer for the association. To quote historian Farwell Brown, Marv is "one of the originals." Congratulations, Marv and Thelma!

- The (Ames) *Daily Tribune* recently published an editorial in support of the creative development of the Ames Depot to include components of attractive and functional public space and landscaping. The Ames Heritage Association supports preservation and suitable development for the depot and appreciates the support of the local newspaper.

- The Ames City Council recently hired a Des Moines consulting firm to inventory city property dating from 1943 to determine their historical significance. Criteria for the inventory include local, state, and national standards based on standards from the National Register of Historic Places. This inventory project has been approved by the Ames Historic Preservation Commission and is supported by the Ames Heritage Association.

- Ames' Historic Old Town Association was recently recognized by *Midwest Living* magazine in the magazine's "hometown pride award" competition. The association was honored in the historic preservation category for its efforts to protect local historic resources by establishing the historic district. The Ames Heritage Association congratulates the Old Town Association and will continue to support the preservation efforts of the association.

- The Ames Heritage Association's efforts to obtain historical landmark recognition for the public safety

building on the corner of 5th and Kellogg were presented recently to the Ames Historical Preservation Commission. The commission returned the proposal to the association, requesting further information and justification of the historical significance of the building. Ames Heritage Association president Kathy Svec has indicated that the association will research the project in more detail before resubmitting the request.

Ames Heritage Association Officers

President Kathy Svec
603 Grand Avenue, Ames
232-4877

Vice- President Don Faas
4419 Ross Road, Ames
232-1613

Secretary Bill LaGrange
2800 Torrey Pines Road, Ames
292-4131

Treasurer Dwight Herold
911 Yuma Circle, Ames
292-1771

Editor Cele Burnett
1214 Curtiss, Ames
232-2791

Ames Official Historian
Farwell T. Brown
1802-20th Street, Ames
232-9444

The Ames Heritage Association meets the third Monday of every month (September through May) at 7:00 p.m. at Willson-Beardshear School, 920 Carroll, Ames.

The annual membership meeting is held the third Monday of January. Time and place are announced in advance.

The *Ames Intelligencer* is published three times a year-winter, spring, and fall.



Kiwanis Donation

The Ames Noon Kiwanis recently made a donation of \$1,000 to support the Bauge House restoration project. In this photo, Bill LaGrange, on the left, representing the Kiwanis, presents the check to Ames Heritage Association board members Sharon Wirth, in the center, and Ann Watts, on the right, at the November 1990 meeting of the organization. The Ames Heritage Association extends its most sincere appreciation to the Noon Kiwanis for their generosity and support for this important local historical preservation project.



From meetings of the Board of Directors of the Ames Heritage Association:

- Financial reports indicating a general fund balance of \$2,067.89 and a Bauge House fund balance of \$5,417.75;
- Reports indicating that nearly \$1,500 has been received in donations towards the Bauge House restoration project since the summer fund-raising letter was distributed;
- Reports by the membership committee concerning recruitment and renewal efforts;
- Reports concerning the Bauge House restoration project, including work on the walls and roofing for the lean-to addition, the open house held in October 1990, winter preparation for the structure, and fund-raising and donation efforts for restoration of the windows;
- Reports concerning Hoggatt School indicating that Don Faas and students from Ames High School repaired the damaged siding and performed general maintenance and repair work; inspection by Steve Lekwa with the Story County Conservation Board indicating that remnants of the prairie plantings are present and providing maintenance recommendations;
- Reports concerning the Billy Sunday cemetery marker indicating that the wording was approved and the plaque will be received by the first of the year;
- Confirmed the speaker for the annual meeting scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, 1991, at 7:00 p.m. at the Ames Public Library (see information elsewhere);
- Report concerning AHA participation in a symposium about the Lincoln Highway scheduled for March 1991 at Iowa State University;
- Report that the Ames Community Arts Council will loan the Ames Heritage Association \$400 to fund the publication of the "Faces of Our Founders" booklet about Ames' early founders as a fund-raising project for the organization;
- Appointed a nominating committee to prepare a slate of candidates for election at the annual meetings scheduled for January 1991; if you are interested in serving as a member of the board of directors, please contact president Kathy Svec;
- Report concerning the printing of 1991 Ames historical calendars; a limited number of these calendars will be available for sale at the January 1991 annual meeting; and
- Listed the Ames Heritage Association as a member of the speakers bureau for the Ames Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Ames Intelligencer
Ames Heritage Association
P.O. Box 821
Ames, Iowa 50010

Non-Profit U.S. Postage PAID Permit No. 122 Ames, Iowa 50010
